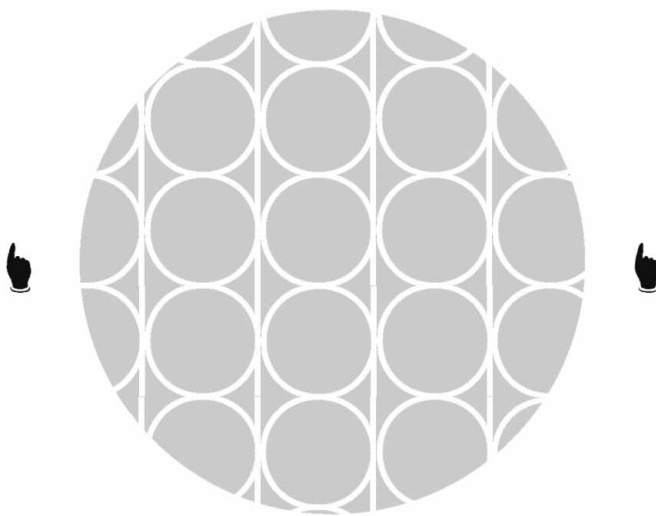


Extended abstract

*The Electoral Ecosystem of Galicia (Spain):
The Role of Rural Territories
in the 2024 Regional Elections*



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Highlights:

1. The Galician electoral system over-represents the inland provinces of Lugo and Ourense.
2. In these provinces, rural areas represent approximately half of the population.
3. In the rural areas of the inland provinces, political mobilization is greater.
4. The over-representation and mobilization of these areas gives them a key electoral role.
5. The Popular Party is the party that has benefited most from these phenomena.

Abstract: Although the study of clientelism has been associated with caciquism, currently the figure of the cacique has been diluted for the benefit of the party machinery, which leads us to focus on the study of the networks that make up the "clientele pyramid", within of which the mayors constitute one of the main nodes when it comes to distributing the resources destined to feed the clientele. Additionally, they are not only in charge of the distribution of resources, but unlike what happened in the Restoration, when political apathy and demobilization facilitated electoral manipulation, now electoral mobilization is a crucial factor when it comes to get majorities. The analysis of the results of the autonomous elections held in Galicia in 2024, taking into account both the habitat and the training of the mayor of each of the Galician municipalities, allows us to see that, given that the Galician electoral system overrepresents the interior provinces of Lugo and Ourense, the electoral mobilization of its rural nuclei, which house approximately half of its population, provides a decisive plus of representation in the configuration of a predominant party system.

Keywords: Galicia elections; Electoral behavior, Rural environment; Clientelism; Habitat; Local power.

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Extended abstract

1. Introduction and justification

The regional elections held in Galicia in 2024 marked the fifth consecutive absolute majority for the Popular Party (PP) in this autonomous community. This party's dominance in Galicia has its roots in the Transition. This paper addresses some key aspects that allow us to understand this phenomenon. First, it analyses how the Galician electoral system overrepresents the provinces of Lugo and Ourense. For illustrative purposes, we have estimated, based on official data provided by the National Institute of Statistics (INE) on the Residents' Census, that what we have called the rural interior (all municipalities with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants in Lugo and Ourense) accounts for 11.75% of the census, although it reaches 12.41% of valid votes (due to its higher participation rate in regional elections). This translates, under electoral regulations, into 19.16% of representation in the regional parliament. This phenomenon benefits the PP, as it is the political party that obtains the best results in these environments, which we have termed «inland rural areas.» The PP's predominance in regional elections in the smaller municipalities of the provinces of Lugo and Ourense can be linked, in part, to the fact that it holds most mayoralties in these environments. This local power, in the most rural areas, would allow it to implement particularistic/clientelist policies, securing the loyalty of a significant portion of the electorate.

While the electoral overrepresentation of the inland provinces has been widely debated, there has been little academic literature addressing this issue and its practical effects on the configuration of the Galician Parliament.

It should be noted that these previous studies address electoral overrepresentation from a provincial level, ignoring the fact that in Lugo and Ourense, for analytical purposes, three clearly distinct environments can be established. First, the provincial capitals, which are home to more than a third of the population and have characteristics typical of urban settlements; Secondly, there are medium-sized municipalities that, despite having a certain degree of urbanization, still have many of the characteristics of rural environments; and finally, smaller municipalities, which in the vast majority of cases

have the characteristics of rural settlements. In this regard, it is important to note that previous studies show that smaller municipalities have higher turnout in regional elections, which implies that within the inland provinces, their weight in the allocation of parliamentarians is greater than would be appropriate based on their population.

Therefore, it is necessary to incorporate into the analysis not only electoral regulations but also the influence of habitat on observed electoral behaviour. Hence the need to analyse the electoral results of rural municipalities in the inland provinces, as well as the role of city councils in the distribution of resources and the channelling of support.

2. Objectives, methodology and sources, areas of study

This paper pursues three clearly defined objectives. The first aims to establish the significant overrepresentation of the rural areas of the inland Galician provinces (Lugo and Ourense) in the elections to the Galician Parliament. While the overrepresentation established by the electoral system in favour of these provinces has been addressed in various studies, none has addressed the fact that, in practice, their rural areas enjoy even greater representation due to their higher electoral mobilization. The second objective is to show that the penetration capacity of the different political parties varies considerably from one territory to another, but also from one type of election to another. Finally, we will relate all of the above to the clientelist phenomenon.

With these premises, our analysis takes the results of the last Galician elections of 2024 as a reference and follows the following steps. To begin, we have considered two criteria when delimiting the different habitat types. The first distinguishes four habitat types, depending on whether the environment is rural, intermediate (which we will call «villages» to distinguish these from the typical rural villages), urban, or metropolitan (large cities). The following section examines the differences in electoral behaviour observed according to the political affiliation of the mayoralties. In previous work, this procedure allowed us to estimate the surplus votes obtained by different parties depending on whether they controlled the mayoralties. This led us to the conclusion that this surplus was especially significant in smaller municipalities and disappeared as the vote grew.

3. Results

The data presented show that while rural municipalities in the inland provinces of Lugo and Ourense, despite only accounting for 11.75% of the Galician electoral roll, in practice achieve 19.16% of the representation in the Galician Parliament (one in every five regional representatives), the large cities of A Coruña and Vigo, which have approximately two-thirds more population than these municipalities, only achieve 15.81% of the representation. Since the PP obtained 56.3% of the vote in these rural municipalities in the provinces of Lugo and Ourense, it can be considered the main beneficiary of the overrepresentation of these areas.

The data presented also allow us to reach a series of conclusions. The first is that political parties obtain better results in regional elections in the municipalities where they hold the mayoralties. The second is that this effect is more significant in the inland provinces. Finally, the PP is the biggest electoral beneficiary of this phenomenon, as it holds most rural mayoralties in this area.

4. Discussion

The data presented corroborate the hypotheses put forward and lead us to a series of vitally important reflections when it comes to understanding the results of the elections to the Galician Parliament. The first is that the initial configuration of the Galician electoral system, which clearly benefited rural Galicia over urban areas, has been maintained. Therefore, it is not surprising that the PP, a party that has clearly predominated in rural areas, has shown little interest in modifying an electoral system that largely benefits it.

Furthermore, it is shown and argued that the voting pattern for the PP in the rural areas of Lugo and Ourense contains a series of patterns perfectly compatible with the existence of clientelist practices, which does not rule out other alternative explanations.

5. Conclusions

This paper highlights the importance of rural municipalities, especially those located in the inland provinces (Lugo and Ourense), in shaping electoral majorities in

the regional government. Taking advantage of the overrepresentation granted to them by the electoral system, these municipalities achieve a larger representation volume than the combined cities of A Coruña and Vigo, despite their much lower demographic weight. Based on this circumstance, the PP obtains a gain in representation that we have been able to estimate at two representatives compared to the combined number of its opponents. This electoral advantage is key to obtaining the repeated absolute majorities achieved by this party in the elections to the Galician Parliament, as well as maintaining its status as the predominant party.

Continuing with previous work, we provide new evidence that the electoral advantage derived from controlling rural municipalities could be associated with the implementation of clientelist strategies aimed at retaining the electorate residing in this type of habitat.

6. Next steps

This work opens three important lines of future research. The first would be to extend the study to other geographic areas to determine whether rural habitats also achieve this level of electoral overrepresentation. The second would be aimed at determining whether the hegemony of the dominant political parties and their ability to obtain electoral advantages is associated with their local power or with multilevel networks such as the one just presented. Finally, fieldwork will allow us to study whether voters in rural environments are more inclined to exchange electoral support for private goods or services.